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No bail for Bulgarian suspect in pope shooting
ROME

A court Monday refused to release a Bulgarian arrested on suspicion of complicity in the shooting of Pope John Paul II, and a U.S. senator said he had new evidence Moscow was behind the assassination bid.

The court declined to grant provisional liberty to Sergei Ivanov Antonov, the former station chief of the Bulgarian airlines arrested Nov. 25 in Rome on suspicion of having participated in the May 13, 1981 assassination attempt.

The court's ruling meant there was sufficient evidence to keep Antonov jailed until trial and the arrest warrant issued against him was justified. No trial date has been set yet.

Besides Antonov, two other Bulgarians and four Turks are suspected to have helped Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca, who was sentenced to life in prison for shooting the pope in St. Peter's Square.

Judicial sources said Agca told investigators Antonov played a role of "support and cover" in the assassination attempt. They said Agca, 24, said Antonov was in St. Peter's Square with him the day of the shooting.

The sources said Agca was able to describe Antonov's Rome apartment in detail, down to the bric-a-brac in the living room. Agca told the investigators the final plans for the shooting were drawn up at the Antonov home.

The sources said Antonov responded to the accusations by saying someone must have told the young Turk what the Antonov apartment looked like.

In an interview in the weekly magazine Panorama, Sen. Alphonse D'Amato said he gave the CIA information from a Vatican source the Soviets were behind the plot.

The New York Republican said the pope personally wrote to the late Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev saying he would return to Poland if the Soviets invaded his homeland.

"That the pope wrote to Brezhnev in very firm terms is a sure fact. It was confirmed to me personally by the monsignor who brought the letter to Moscow and then returned to get the response from the Kremlin," the magazine quoted D'Amato as saying.

"It was a hand-written letter, in Russian, by the pope himself. If the Russians would invade Poland, the letter said, the pope would return to be by the side of his people."

The magazine did not say when the letter was sent, but other Italian reports apparently about the same letter said John Paul informed the Soviet leadership of his intentions in the first months of 1981.

D'Amato's comments appeared to support media reports the plot was conceived by the Soviets because of the pontiff's continued vocal support of the Solidarity union in Poland.